

Abstract

The scribe was one of the most outstanding figures in ancient Mesopotamia. His significance was obviously owing to the paramount importance of the role he played in the society and the state. Among his numerous tasks were the writing down of the royal records, details of campaigns besides the writing of letters and contracts concerning everyday-life activities, including : bookkeeping for monthly and annual economic transactions such as those relating to agriculture and trade.

The scribe had also been in charge of documenting state-letters, interstate details of the momentous achievement of kings. Therefore, learning the profession of a scribe and its techniques was of a vital significance for many individuals in ancient Mesopotamia. It taught the apprentice then how to divulge life's innermost secrets and master scholarly disciplines. It taught the scribe the evolution of states and the succession of kingdoms in Mesopotamia across ages.

The scribe in ancient Mesopotamia used to hold the highest positions and offices due to their mastery of their profession. They were held in high esteem in their society in comparison to other social classes. Thousands of cuneiform inscriptions testify to the onerous efforts which the scribe had made in their historiographical endeavor as they took up the task of writing down on stone and clay numerous disciplines of scholarship and concerns of their age. To them also belongs the favour of saving for next generations the literary texts and cultural heritage of ancient Mesopotamia.

This study relies on numerous cuneiform inscriptions both published and unpublished translated and in Assyrian script in order to present a perfect image of the scribe and his status in Mesopotamia across ages.

The study is accordingly divided into five chapters. The First Chapter tackles the emergence of the profession of the scribe, its significance and development in ancient Mesopotamia. It encompasses several sections related to the investigation of the philosophy and semantics of the term "scribe" besides its evolution as indicated by cuneiform scripts in historical ages. It then expands on the motivation behind learning the profession, opportunities of its learning and the development of the scribe in ancient schools, his acquisition of the three skills and the cuneiform symbols.

The Second Chapter is dedicated for expounding types of scribes, tasks allocated to them each according to the scribe's type as well as the privileges and rights they used to enjoy throughout their jobs and offices

they held in the administrative institutions, palaces and temples, let alone, the various services they offered to all walks of the society at that time.

The Third Chapter provides an account on the social and religious status in the ancient Mesopotamian society which reached the highest possible rank for it was generally believed then that the foundation of the profession of the scribe was divine since Nabu and Nisaba were considered scribe deities. Moreover, the kings, themselves, regarded themselves to be patron of scribes and inscription. In fact, the privileges a scribe enjoyed made a monopoly of the job that it turned into a hereditary profession among certain families across ages. Scribes' salaries were highly competitive. They used to receive gifts in kind and numerous proverbs and maxims of old celebrated and glorified the scribe and his pioneering role.

The Fourth Chapter sheds light on the archives and the meeting venues of the scribes in the remains of ancient cities. It gives an image of the tools and materials they used in inscription as well .

The Fifth Chapter gives details of the representation of the scribe in works of art such as seals, votive slabs, sculpture in the round as well as in wall ornamentation in relief and murals. These works of art do, beyond doubt, reflect the various activities of the scribes, the tools they employed and the methods and techniques of inscription, besides the uniform they used to wear.

Finally, the study embraces a number of tables which details on some types of scribes and the stages of development of cuneiform that are related to the profession of the scribe.